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ABSTRACT

Educators concerned with effectiveness outcomes have become increasingly involved with participative organizational and teaching practices designed to improve school climate. Since schools have traditionally emphasized "top down" management and decision-making procedures, few school districts have the experience or expertise to develop and maintain participative procedures (like quality circles) at administrative, staff, student, or community levels of involvement. Consequently, many attempts to build leadership teams and principal advisory committees from the bottom up have failed miserably. School communities often desire improvement, but resist change and disruptions brought by innovations. With few tested, replicable districtwide approaches to problem-solving, many schools end up curtailing, faking, or abandoning the involvement process. This paper discusses various issues and methods useful for translating the quality of life model exemplified by "Japanese" management to a district- or school-based Quality of School Life model. After providing some historical context, the paper discusses participation components and guidelines and ways to initiate a change to structured participation. This process requires a long-range strategic plan, specific assignments, consultation and training, and a realistic resource commitment. The paper closes by providing case examples of successful Quality of School Life programs in Michigan, Massachusetts, and Florida. Included are 30 references. (MLH)

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Quality Circles Go to School: Improving School Climate through Pupil, Staff, and Community Involvement[1, 2]

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Introduction: History and Context

Recently, in addition to curricular and instructional issues, several trends have noted that *school climate*, *organizational culture*, and *decision-making practices* of the schools have profound consequences for student learning. These trends emphasize implications in various lines of research which indicate that appropriate participation and "involvement," at all levels of a school district, correlate with many measures of effective learning (Brookover *et al*, 1979; Edmunds & Frederikson, 1979; Lezotte *et al.*, 1980; National Commission, 1983; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Thompson, 1984; Kyle, 1985). Consequently, administrators and educators concerned with effectiveness outcomes have increasingly been directing their attention toward more participative organizational and teaching practices.

Since schools have traditionally emphasized "top down" and "chain-of-command" procedures for information gathering, problem solving, implementation, and evaluation aspects of the decision-making process, few school districts have the experience or expertise to systematically develop and maintain participative procedures at the administrative, staff, student, or community levels of involvement. As a result, many attempts at "bottom up" involvement of stakeholders have foundered, so that participants and other individuals responsible for outcomes have become frustrated, cynical, or angry, as they become bewildered by a mass of confusing and inconsistent expectations, directives, procedures, roles, and norms.

Many measures have been studied and promulgated, in order to take the temperature of a school's "climate" and to focus on specific areas which need improvement (Coughlin, 1970; Anderson, 1982). However, careful observers of school climate have noted that school buildings are like small communities — desiring improvement, but highly resistant to the temporary disruptions of culture and custom which are required when innovations are introduced (Sarason,1971). Thus, with few tested, replicable procedures for school or

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district-wide participatory approaches to problem solving, many schools end up curtailing,"faking," or eventually abandoning the involvement process.

During the past few decades, while the schools focused their attention on other issues, business and industry were perfecting a "Quality of Work Life/Quality Circle" methodology for multi-level staff participation — developing parallel "circular" structures, whose norms and procedures are as systematic and predictable as the "top down" "pyramidal" hierarchy with which it co-exists quite comfortably (Stein, 1983; Walton, 1986). Only recently has this approach been adapted, tested, and utilized by the schools, at the levels both of the adults (Schmuck & Runckel, 1985; Schelkun, 1988a) and of the students (Weissberg *et al.*, 1981; Shure & Spivack, 1982; Schelkun, 1985, 1987,1988b). This paper will discuss a number of issues and methods which have proved useful in translating the Quality of Work Life (QWL) model, as exemplified by the Deming and "Japanese" management methods (Pascale & Athos, 1981; Walton, 1986), to a district or school-wide Quality of School Life(QSL) model.

In order to draw upon the background and experience of the authors, examples and anecdotes will be drawn from a single, integrated QSL program which is currently being implemented in Michigan, Massachusetts, and Florida (Schelkun, 1985, 1988 a,b). Demonstration cases in sustained, systematic, interactive activities will be discussed and will briefly demonstrate participative processes in elementary schools at various levels within several school districts .

Participation Components and Guidelines

It is important to define the widely-accepted components of the standard model for QWL procedures: these components require some adaptation for use in elementary schools. The heart of the Deming method involves activities of the "shop floor" work crew, with participation occurring chiefly in homogeneous planning groups called "Quality Control Circles" (often referred to as "Q C Circles"). Each Q C Circle is a permanent, homogeneous problem-solving team, composed of volunteer members from an identifiable work crew and its immediate supervisor. Any one industrial plant or building may support a hundred or more Q C Circles — as many as there are work crews — meeting regularly in order to identify product-related problems, seek out relevant causes, explore various alternatives, implement promising procedures, and evaluate the results of their activities. The Q C Circle system is supported by a central administration facilitation structure. A centralized QWL facilitator oversees the training, coordination, communication, access to resources, and problem-solving practices of the various participative activities throughout the organization. Because an important function of the centralized QWL facilitator is to see

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that all participative activities are appropriately linked with those of the hierarchical system, it is essential that the facilitator report to a central administrator.

In translating the QWL model to school systems, where the identifiable "products" are the series of test scores which reflect student learning, the logical correlate of the QC Circle is found in the classroom — with the teacher functioning as *supervisor* and the students forming the *problem-solving work crew*. In the Elementary School Quality of School Life *(QSL-E)* program discussed in this paper, a K-6 curriculum is used to teach the students the concepts and problem-solving skills necessary for effectively teaming with the teacher — in order to identify classroom-based problems and opportunities, engage in appropriate fact-finding, set goals, brainstorm alternative solutions, discuss likely consequences, develop action plans, test and implement plans, evaluate results, and "fine tune" their plans as a result of their evaluations. The students learn that complex issues require commitment and patience, since a single action plan usually takes a number of days before a plan is developed and put into action. The classroom problem solving unit is called a Pupil Involvement *(PI)* Circle, and any school building can conceivably support as many PI Circles as there are classrooms. These PI Circles are encouraged to meet daily, for 15 minutes at a time.

Many school districts have attempted to institutionalize similar kinds of participation at the staff level by creating "building leadership teams," "principal's advisory committees," and other structures which are expected to develop cooperative decision-making procedures among teaching staffs and principals. Unfortunately, these problem-solving groups rarely live up to their potential. Teachers who discover the benefits of interacting more systematically, with Pupil Involvement Circles in their classrooms, are quick to suggest that staff/administrator participation might profit from similar procedures. What seems to work best is a group of professional staff, meeting twice a month with the building administrator, as a Staff Involvement *(SI)* Group which follows predictable guidelines consistent with standard QWL concepts:

(1) The building administrator (and a union representative where there is a teacher's union) are present at all meetings,

(2) All other participation is voluntary. SI participants are committed to participate for the remainder of the school year, and the first three meetings of the fall semester,

(3) The meeting manager (facilitator) is a member of a building's facilitation team, who has been trained to lead interactive group meetings (the building administrator and union representative do not facilitate meetings),

(4) All meetings are "open" and any staff member may join,

(5) Outside resources are invited to join temporarily, where this is appropriate,

(6) Group recommendations are reached by *consensus*: (When there is no meeting of the minds, the building administrator considers the information which has been generated and makes an administrative decision),

(7) Only building-level issues are considered,

(8) Agendas and other working papers are open for total staff viewing,

(9) Brief minutes are kept for each meeting. Minutes are distributed and posted, for the benefit of all staff, and copies are forwarded to a Central Administrator/Facilitator and the union President,

(10)The group produces *recommendations* and the building administrator retains responsibility for all *decisions*. (Since the building administrator is a participant and since all recommendations require consensus, all the group's *final recommendations* are implemented),

(11) There is a predictable time sequence and procedure for an administrator's accepting/implementing or rejecting an SI Group's recommendations,

(12) All stakeholders in the school are given opportunities for input at various stages of problem-solving, implementation, and evaluation,

(13) An effective range of communication channels is established and utilized,

(14) SI Group activities are coordinated with chain-of-command procedures,

(15) Members of a school's initial SI Group receive training in interactive problem-solving concepts and methods,

(16) Collective bargaining issues "up for negotiation" or those which are already in a staff contract are not addressed by the SI Group,

(17) Issues whose implementation responsibilities are outside the group are not addressed by the SI Group — except as fact-finding is forwarded to those in the responsible roles,

(18) Individuals and temporary task forces are formed, monitored, and supported by the SI Group, when complex problems require additional time and commitment,

(19) Building level Involvement Groups are composed of individuals with *homogeneous roles*. Different SI Groups may be formed for a variety of staff groupings at the building level: a Teacher Involvement *(TI)* Group, a Pupil Personal Involvement *(PPI)* Group, a Lunchroom Supervisor's Involvement *(LSI)* Group , and a Family Involvement *(FI)* Group are some examples,

(20) The SI Group process has the support and commitment of Central Administration.When a district legitimizes the formation of SI Groups, a Central District

Participation Team is formed and a Central Administrator or a supportive designee is appointed as the District's Participation Facilitator.

At the Central District level the Superintendent may choose to extend the participation process in order to train, charge, monitor, and develop a wide range of participatory committees and task forces — using concepts and procedures similar to those implemented at the building level. At the very least, it is helpful for the Superintendent to utilize effective "interactive" meeting procedures within the administrator's Cabinet and to support the Participation Team and the Participation Facilitator with realistic resources, empowerment, and expectations.

In a district with a full-range Central District participative apparatus, one might see a *consistent system* of problem-solving activities including (1) A Superintendent's Cabinet which utilizes interactive meeting techniques, (2) A number of "between meeting" *ad hoc* task forces at the Cabinet level, each composed of various resource participants and at least one Cabinet member, (3) Various "cross program" problem-solving task groups, where coordinated activities among heterogeneous groups are necessary, (4) Various problem-solving groups composed of dispersed individuals with homogeneous tasks, and who report to building administrators — such as clerical workers, substitute teachers, and itinerant "special" resource persons, (5) Similar community-based problem-solving task forces familiar with interactive methods and supported by both the district and the parent/teacher organizations.

Various specialized departments would be encouraged to develop similar structures and procedures. Examples include transportation, pupil personnel, guidance and counseling, custodian, and cafeteria staffs and their supervisors.

Sequencing a Change to Structured Participation

When a school district is committed to improving the climate of the its schools and its various subcultures there is no proven way of reaching this goal, short of a commitment to systematic, predictable, participative processes which penetrate deep into the system. Years of research into the workings of organizational culture have shown that the hierarchical "chain-of-command" cannot make a dent in the way a school's mission is carried out or thwarted in the classroom, lunchroom, on a bus, or on a playing field by issuing directives, memos, threats, or pleas for cooperation. This is particularly noticeable when changes are decreed "from above." Even when such changes are congruent with widely held values, it is hard for any change to overcome the typical school system's present momentum, since at all levels staff and students find it easier to just continue business as

usualr rather than to take necessary and confusing steps to fit the change process into an already overwhelming mass of commitments, routines, and expectations (Sarason, 1971).

Some school districts solve the problem of improving school climate by ignoring it; some make a limited commitment to participation and muddle along, while some simply fake it. A small percentage of districts have hired organizational consultants skilled in the QWL methodology and have developed effective QSL procedures for staff and community participation. Even fewer districts have discovered the benefits of encouraging systematic Pupil Involvement Quality Circles within the elementary school classroom.

The authors' experiences have shown that an authentic commitment to participation requires a long-range strategic plan, specific role assignments, consultation and training, and a realistic commitment of resources. It also requires that all links in the chain of command be enthusiastically committed to the process and all that it takes to make it work. The School Superintendent and Cabinet traditionally receive a brief orientation and some introduction to interactive procedures. They then establish a Participation Team, which meets with a QSL consultant (either someone within the district who has learned the process or an external organizational development consultant), to develop recommendations for goals, priorities, and milestones for a five year implementation plan.

A central Participation Facilitator is appointed; funds are budgeted; time is released for necessary tasks; and methodologies, handbooks, curricula, consultants, and other resources are selected. Once a design has been tentatively approved, and a first-year focus for participation has been chosen, relevant union representatives are informed of the district's intentions and union representation is added to the Participation Team. If the relevant unions do not actively support and participate in various participation processes, the district can expect to alter its first-year participative activities and to limit these to groups which are not directly affected by collective bargaining.

Because all participants are expected to be enthusiastic volunteers, there needs to be a sufficient orientation procedure for those constituencies which are to be recruited at each phase of implementation. Building administrators and specialty supervisors *volunteer* to implement S I groups; Teachers *volunteer* to implement P I groups; and Cabinet members *volunteer* to facilitate centralized task forces in order to implement a first-year demonstration. There is no "hard sell," and no attempt is made to coerce participants at any level or at any time. Each district has its own natural flow, through which changes disperse, and it can be assumed that it will take approximately five years of development and maintenance before a participatory system will create a critical mass sufficient to affect climate and culture within involved portions of the district.

The Facilitator and Participation Team will have ready access to the Superintendent, and there will be ongoing "marketing" and recruitment for participatory activities; training for new Involvement Groups; explicit guidelines, practices and norms; a wide range of communication approaches; ongoing budgetary support; technical assistance to Involvement Groups; evaluation; and re-design of the system, as needed.

When a district becomes as committed to the participatory process as some industries have been, then it may hope to have similar measurable successes in controlling the quality, effectiveness, and outcomes of its efforts. Parallel, participative structures can then be expected to function cooperatively with the chain-of-command hierarchies — more hopefully and with less friction than when participation occurs in the usual "hit-or-miss" fashion.

Participation in Action: Case Examples

Organizational consultants recommend a logical approach toward implementing participation and involvement practices. In school districts, that would mean a serious commitment from successive school boards and a similar, demonstrated understanding and commitment by central administration, before widely applying QSL procedures at the building level. On paper, this makes good sense; in reality, however, things are seldom this tidy.

In the authors' experience, successful QSL dispersion throughout a school district follows a route that is more natural than logical. Somewhere in the system someone enthusiastic and credible enough to "sell" the idea to his or her next-in-command becomes well-informed about the process. Appropriate legitimation is obtained, participants are recruited, and the QSL methods are implemented at that level. Since there are few secrets in school systems, successes soon become apparent; new recruits learn about the approach and request similar resources and legitimation. Eventually, a history of successful replications establishes credibility among various constituencies in the district. At some time thereafter, a logical "top-down" central administration strategy for district-wide implementation is developed into a five year plan. (It is important to announce the likelihood of such a five year plan as early as possible during the demonstration phase; otherwise, the procedures are likely to remain scattered and vulnerable to "wash out," whenever a building administrator or key participant leaves or is transferred.)

- **An example of natural sequencing within a school district**: For example, after a small metropolitan school district had been utilizing various participatory procedures for many years, its leadership endorsed a demonstration of a structured QSL procedure in a single elementary school. Consultants assisted teachers in

implementing Pupil Involvement Circles in many of the classrooms and assisted the Principal in supporting an effective Teacher Involvement *(TI)* Group, together with its related Task Forces. At about this time, the School Board — in developing its five year, Long Range Strategic Plan — was emphasizing participative processes, by setting goals for participation at all levels of the system. Having had a chance to compare the results of one school's systematic, QSL approach to participation, the Superintendent obtained central administration orientation to the concepts and consultation for a more systematic approach to interactive problem solving. As a result, the Superintendent's Cabinet implemented a set of participative processes at the most central level, thereby increasing visibility and legitimation for such procedures throughout the district. From this beginning, at a rate comfortable for the system, the Board's goals could be seen to be supported and maintained at the top of the system, and could then "cascade" downward and outward, to be maintained in a more planful manner than had occurred in the past.

- **An example of district-wide dispersion of building-level Participation Committees**: In another school district, the Education Association negotiated a contract which specified the existence of Building Advisory Committees, each composed of the Building Administrator and various teacher representatives. In order to maximize the effectiveness of its Committee, one elementary school decided to train all staff in QSL procedures, and then utilized standardized *interactive guidelines* to develop and maintain its problem-solving activities. The successes were informally shared with other buildings, and in the following year two thirds of the elementary schools in that district were on their way toward formalizing similar QSL procedures.

- **An example of building level problem-solving for a specified goal**: In another case, several elementary schools in two school districts were struggling with the desire to develop a more consistent approach to student management and discipline throughout the building. These — like most schools — had teachers whose disciplinary styles and values ranged along a continuum from the authoritarian approach to the laissez-faire. It was obvious that all points of view would have to be accommodated if there were to be consistent, school-wide support for a new disciplinary code, a predictable set of reporting guidelines, and consistent enforcement practices. These schools shared a common consultant, and were thus able to benefit from one another's experience. Although not all of these schools had an established SI Group, each used interactive procedures in forming "School-wide

Discipline Task Forces," or in using portions of staff meetings to perform feedback functions. After a series of procedures, each school staff reached consensus on a single-page "traffic ticket," which enabled any adult to report a student to the principal's office. The "ticket" included two segments: (1) **Required Reporting**, for infractions such as *stealing, extortion, dangerous fighting, and the like*, and (2) **Discretionary Reporting**, for such behaviors as *repeated disruptions, work refusal, or rudeness*. Once a child was sent to the office, all agreed that the principal would follow predictable, agreed-upon procedures for Type (1) offenses but would use his or her discretion for all Type (2) offenses. The reporting form was circulated and filed, to provide a simple means of communicating to staff and parents regarding the outcome of the visit to the office, as well as establishing a useful record for observing and reporting patterns of incidents for individuals and for the school itself. Of course, such a system might have been created by the building administrator alone — and in some schools, that worked; however, when school-wide, consistent staff behaviors are the goal, it is usually worth the effort to put in the time and effort "up front," rather than to endure the many frustrating discoveries that accompany a less credible imposed system, which staff may be more likely to subvert or ignore. In each of the schools that developed its own "traffic ticket" through participatory procedures, acceptance and implementation were immediate and there were consistent school and community-wide expectations regarding unacceptable behaviors and their consequences.

- **An example of Family and Community Involvement**: In two nearby elementary schools which had successfully established Teacher Involvement and Pupil Involvement procedures, it was decided to extend the QSL interactive procedures and guidelines to the Parent/Teacher organizations. Each Parent/Teacher Board received an initial orientation and then created enthusiastic Community/School Involvement committees, whose task is to explore ways to enhance family and community cooperation with the school, identify parent needs as well as potential resources for meeting those needs, and track a variety of task forces which recommend new responses for identified needs. The use of the preliminary orientation has enabled the committee and its task forces to follow predictable interactive procedures and to cooperate with the expectations and other activities of the Parent/Teacher Board.
- **An example of a district's natural dispersion of interactive problem solving in the classroom**: After a one-year demonstration of the way an integrated K-6 Quality Circle curriculum was able to implement interactive processes

in the classroom, a school district agreed to a five year plan utilizing natural dispersion methods to encourage the use of the curriculum and its related procedures throughout the district. In addition to translating the Deming method to the classroom, this curriculum utilizes a number of approaches which have gained favor among professional educators, including concepts related to the "integrative curriculum" (White, 1986), "cooperative learning" (Johnson & Johnson, 1985), social competency education (Ojemann, 1961; Weissberg *et al*, Shure & Spivack, 1982; Schelkun, 1988 a,b), "skill-streaming" (McGinnis et al, 1984), and other tested and widely used methodologies (Ojemann, 1961; Glasser, 1969; Dinkmeyer, 1974). As formal announcements and the grapevine developed an awareness in the district, individual building administrators and their staffs were oriented to concepts and methods associated with Pupil Involvement. Interested teachers received training and consultation as they implemented the procedures in their classrooms. By the end of this, the fourth year of the plan, teachers in all the district's elementary schools are using Pupil Involvement methodologies in their classrooms. There is now a critical mass of enthusiastic, skilled Pupil Involvement practitioners, who have been able to interest an ever-spreading cadre of teachers thereby encouraging the further dispersion of interactive concepts and methods.

Summary:

Contrary to popular myth, participative activity in the organization is not just something that intelligent, committed people of good will can do as a quick and easy adjunct to their existing duties. Nor is it as overwhelming and time-consuming as it may seem. Every district in the nation is already effectively utilizing some variant of the QSL method in a limited way — in specialized task forces, committees, or informal groupings in the teachers' lounge. However, without a tested, systematic approach there is little chance of institutionalizing successful approaches or legitimizing the many informal group activities, which have the potential to develop into disruptive conspiracies rather than serve as welcomed enhancements of an administrators' decision-making activities. It has been demonstrated that a phased, planful QSL approach to participation can be as useful to school districts as the QWL approach has been to business and industry and that it can work at all levels — with students in the elementary school classroom, with building staffs and their principals, with groups of building administrators, within specialty and support departments, within central administration, and with groups of parents or other community representatives.

The chief benefit of systematizing a QSL process lies in premise of self-maintainance. Once the school culture accepts and understands the process, it no longer depends on the commitment of specific individuals for maintenance and survival: superintendents can move on and be replaced, principals and teachers can be transferred, collective bargaining can create new contracts, but the participative process goes on, pretty much as before. What it takes is the same things that any other commitment requires: widespread recognition and legitimacy, planning, phased implementation, systematic procedures and guidelines, coordination and communication, adequate funding, clear role assignments, training, adequate resources, evaluation, and re-design. It's a lot of work — those who have tried it and seen its potential realized would not have it any other way!

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